

TROUBLE IN PARADISE:

A LIFE CUT SHORT

A CREATIVE PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

My creative project, a stop-motion animated short film, *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short* uses a non-conventional medium to address substance abuse and its consequences. I present the perils of substance abuse using a simple and non-threatening format allowing the viewer to identify with the characters and their situation. It is my intent, as the artist, that this short film will reach viewers that previously fell through the cracks with traditional educational films on substance abuse. My paper reviews artistic influences including my personal aesthetic, impressionism, and contemporary animators. Hands on techniques such as model making, armature building and the process of filmmaking in this medium are discussed. The lengthy process, that is hallmark to stop-motion animation, shooting the scenes, constructing the props, building the characters, and forming the background are reviewed. These tools of the art are compared to computer generated filmmaking today. The process of animation with the newer computer imagery is much shorter and allows the film to be produced with less time. But, Claymation and mixed media are tools that bring the realistic element to the art as seen in my stop-motion animated substance abuse film. Greater research is needed to determine if this medium is appropriate for broaching this subject and I feel it should be regarded as an avenue for further exploration.

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This creative project paper will describe my personal journey as an artist while learning and growing during the past three years as a graduate student to that of a contemporary animation film maker. I feel that having a background in fine arts and being born in the late 1960's gives me an advantage over some of my younger peers who may lack life experiences prior to the advent of technology. As a child of the 1960's, cartoons were important to me as they are to most little children. It is from this magical visual graphic time in my life that I began to love drawing. I remember tracing the characters off cereal boxes anytime an adult would hand me a crayon.

My creative art project is a stop-motion animated short film using Claymation and mixed media. My film is titled, *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*, was created using the medium of stop-motion animation to bring awareness to drug abuse and the current drug epidemic in the United States.¹ More than one hundred and seventy-five Americans will die each day of a drug overdose in the United States.² The daily death toll from drug overdoses could be compared to a 737 passenger aircraft crashing and killing all on board. If plane crashes like that happened everyday, “we’d shut the skies down until we figured out the problem,” according to former Mississippi Attorney General Mike Moore.³ America is having a drug epidemic and left

¹ Jerry Mitchell, "With 175 Americans Dying a Day, What Are the Solutions to the Opioid Epidemic?," USA TODAY, last modified January 29, 2018, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2018/01/29/175-americans-dying-day-what-solutions-opioid-epidemic/1074336001/>.

² Mitchell, "With 175 Americans"

³ Ibid.

unchecked it could claim over one million lives by 2020.⁴ My film in its simplicity and unexpected ending will hopefully reach an audience that can accept the reality that help is needed. If one life is saved, then my film has served a purpose.

Although cartoons and adult humor are mainstay topics for this medium, traditional animation has shown that it can be applied to more than one audience and be successful.⁵ In the beginning of the 1950s, animated cartoons were made available through the new medium of television. Children were the target audience. Today, people of all ages will likely see an animated film in their lifetime. Since animated cartoons were produced and made available to the masses, multiple generations have been enjoying the stories and characters found in animated films or cartoons.

My stop-motion animated short film, *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*, does not sugarcoat the issue of our nations substance abuse crisis. While my film does not bring immediate solutions to the table regarding this multifaceted dilemma, it does bring awareness. The goal of my film is to bring awareness of the current drug abuse epidemic in the U.S. While simultaneously reaching an audience that needs to see the reality of the problem to save their own life. My film exposes the senseless tragedy and personal loss and death resulting from substance abuse.

The film topic of substance abuse is close to my heart. I have been witness to several people in my life who have succumbed to this monster. I have seen drugs take lives, ruin lives, and I feel that as a contemporary filmmaker it is my civil duty to produce art that not only makes the world brighter and more beautiful, but also offers innovative choices to make the world

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Carlos Aguilar, "6 International and Independent 2D-Animated Features in the Oscar Race," IndieWire, last modified December 17, 2015, <http://www.indiewire.com/2015/12/6-international-and-independent-2d-animated-features-in-the-oscar-race-168321/>, 15 February 2018.

better. Technology can now make choices such as seeking wellness available to the masses. Art can be streamed via film into the home. Theoretically, a stop-motion animated short educational film series on substance abuse, based on my animated film, could provide tools for recovery and online liaisons available in real time to assist those in active need of assistance.

I have addressed the issue of substance abuse and its worst-case scenario in my stop-motion animated short film *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*. It is intended to be an educational film on drug abuse. As my film progressed, I realized that I was not only using a non-traditional theme for this medium. One aspect that makes my stop-motion animated film unique is that of the subject matter. The message about the consequences of drug abuse is found by watching the events unfold in the life of the characters. Using playful animation is a way to encourage viewers to seek help for substance abuse or encourage them to recognize the behavior in others that may be a cry for help. Since animation and substance abuse education have not historically been paired, they are not expected together and the message is somewhat incongruent. In the case of my stop-motion animated film, *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*, animation and tragedy work well together to create instant sarcasm, give an element of surprise, and to offer a stark contrast to the happy ending normally anticipated in animated film.

When starting production on my creative project film using Claymation and mixed media, I had no idea how much time this project would take or how much it would involve computer assisted technology. As a realist, artistic talent has always been seen by me as something that manifested solely because of the creator. Simply said, before my stop motion film project, I believed that art was created entirely by the artist's hand or mind and definitely was not programmable. Today, I still prefer to use a hands-on technique when creating art, however, this stop-motion animated short film project has given me a new perspective on

filmmaking. I now believe in combining computer assisted technology in my process along with traditional handmade props and models to save time. However, the old art of creating stop-motion with your hands and imagination is not dead. It was the advent of computer generated imagery that removed stop-motion animation from the mainstream. I strongly believe that its unique qualities and realistic textures will keep the landscape of stop-motion animation alive and well in the future of filmmaking. Ideally, I believe that for me and for the future of the stop-motion film industry that the balance lies between joining the old craft of stop-motion animation with the newest computer-generated imagery tools.

The evolution of animation is a topic that I am very passionate about. Without the advances in technology and computer assisted imagery many films available today would not exist. This is considered a traditional method of film making and by definition is produced without computer assistance. During the production of my film, everything was hand constructed and all my “art” is original. However, I did merge away from the animation traditional model when I elected to upload my camera to the Dragonframe frame-grabbing software which was created for stop-motion animation and time-lapse photography.

Dragonframe is not only the choice of frame grabbing software for big budget studios such as Disney, Aardman and Laika, but is also highly recommended by more amateur animators in a recent review.⁶ I must confess that when I first opened the program and saw my set projected on the screen in front of me, I felt like a professional stop-motion animator. One of the most helpful features of the program was onion skinning, which allowed the animator to see both the previous frame and live image projected at the same time. Another feature that I could not imagine working without was immediate playback. The luxury of playing back a sequence

⁶ Animataurus.com, "Stop Motion Software | Reviews, Tutorials and Best Buys," Animataurus - A Close-Up on Animation, accessed February 18, 2018, <http://animataurus.com/stop-motion-software/>.

instantly, and not having to wait weeks to see rushes as animators have done in the past allowed me to constantly reflect on my work and improve.

The topic of my film was chosen not only because it has personal meaning, but because opiate addiction has been classified as a national epidemic.⁷ According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, in 2016 about 948,000 Americans reportedly had used heroin in the past year.⁸ This is a number that, sadly, has been on the rise since 2007.⁹ This trend appears to be driven largely by young adults aged 18–25; the number of people using heroin for the first time is unacceptably high. According to the National Institute of Health, drug overdose deaths and opioid-involved deaths have continued to increase in the United States. More than three out of five drug overdose deaths involve an opioid.¹⁰ Overdose deaths from opioids, including prescription opioids and heroin have increased by more than five times since 2005.¹¹ Reportedly, deaths from drug overdoses are up among both men and women of all races, and adults of nearly all ages.¹²

Historically, tactics traditionally used for addressing the opiate drug epidemic revolved around fear, intimidation, and violence. Unfortunately, these negative emotions usually create more of the same, which is in direct opposition of the goal to end the madness. I was a young adult during the years that President Reagan was in office and remember the “Just Say No” campaign well. Shortly after the First Lady launched her “Just Say No” campaign, congress

⁷ SAMHSA.gov, "Reports and Detailed Tables From the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)," SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, last modified 21, 2018, <https://www.samhsa.gov/samhsa-data-outcomes-quality/major-data-collections/reports-detailed-tables-2016-NSDUH>, 22 February 2018.

⁸ SAMHSA.gov, “Reports and Detailed Tables”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

passed the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986.¹³ It was the 1980's, and “Just Say No” was the cultural, family-oriented prong of the White House's assault on America's drug problem.

This campaign was also responsible for bringing police into the schools. The police officers started arresting students not only for drug possession, but reportedly for any other minor infractions such as dress code violation. About this time when the police entered the schools, Black and Latino kids were shown to be more likely arrested at school for violations. Children who enter the juvenile justice system often do not graduate and become part of the cycle of poverty and they find themselves in the criminal defense system as adults.¹⁴ Fear, intimidation, and violence did not work as tactics during the war on drugs. Nor, will it work today. Logically, another approach should be sought.

Currently, according to the Drug Policy Alliance, it is” fashionable” to do heroin. Intravenous heroin overdoses are often called accidental deaths.¹⁵ Accidental drug overdose is currently the leading cause of injury-related death in the United States for people between the ages of 35-54 and the second leading cause of injury-related death for younger people. Drug overdose deaths now exceed those attributable to firearms, homicides or HIV/AIDS.¹⁶ Accidental drug death is defined and resides in a separate category from suicide. If someone takes a large amount of illegal substance to get high and takes too much and dies, then it is deemed an

¹³ Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, "Ronald Reagan: Address to the Nation on the Campaign Against Drug Abuse," The American Presidency Project, accessed February 18, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36414>.

¹⁴ Tierney Sneed, "School Resource Officers: Safety Priority or Part of the Problem?" usnews.com, last modified January 30, 2015, <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/01/30/are-school-resource-officers-part-of-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-problem>. 22 February 2018.

¹⁵ National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Intentional Vs. Unintentional Overdose Deaths," National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) |, last modified February 13, 2017, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment/intentional-vs-unintentional-overdose-deaths>. 20 February 2018.

¹⁶ National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Intentional Vs. Unintentional".

accidental drug death. The overdose is only defined as a suicide if the purpose for taking the drug was intended to cease life functions.¹⁷

I feel that when society takes responsibility away from the individual and places the blame on the drug, then the wrong message is being sent. The strength of my film is apparent in its simplicity and it is nonthreatening. It does not place blame or draw any conclusions. It only tells the story and leaves the viewer to decipher the meaning.

My stop-motion film provides a light medium to communicate a dark subject. Those in recovery may find it easier to discuss personal and intimate details after viewing an animated film. Therefore, when time is of the essence, I believe it is essential to get the attention of the audience. That is why I have proposed introduction of the “shock factor” into my character role and story plot. Early intervention in substance abuse is the key to arresting the problem before it escalates to the point of suicide or death.¹⁸

The characters in my film are fictional and created for easy identification by the average viewer. The film takes place in a hot climate somewhere in the United States. The title, *Trouble in Paradise*, alludes to a location that is ideal or paradisaal. The background has colorful foliage painted in pastel colors which alerts the audience that it is springtime. The green palm trees represent a subtropical locale. The background is set in contrast to the reality that my film portrays. The background is bright and colorful, whereas the reality of this subject is dark. I have three characters in my film: Joey, Penny, and Steve. Joey is a father who was recently widowed. He takes care of his young daughter Penny. Joey has a life long friend, Steve, who

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Maia Szalavitz, "US Addiction Statistics Are Dire. Small Changes Won't Solve the Problem | Maia Szalavitz," *The Guardian*, last modified July 14, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/18/us-drug-alcohol-addiction-statistics-treatment-reform>. 16 February 2018.

travels by bus to visit the family. He arrives unaware of the substance abuse addiction from which Joey suffers.

My stop-motion animated film, *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*, depicts a common scenario in the life of an opiate drug user which ends with dire and deadly consequences. This dark theme is not obvious by the title of my film. However, in retrospect, choosing to leave out the second part of the title to my film “a life cut short” would have been less ominous. Using the idea of a “shock factor” as an attention getting movie tactic occurred to me sometime during the story process. Art, I believe, is a creative process and is continually changing. The film is a perfect tool to successfully relay a quick symbolic blunt message. The overt message is “don’t shoot drugs or you will die”. The real message is read between the lines of my film and runs deeper than the tragic ending. Like peeling the layers of an onion, when recovering from a drug addiction, problems arise that were masked by the drug use. My short film has captured the lack of emotional pain that should have been expressed through grief with the death of Penny’s mother. Joey, as an addict, does not address his or Penny’s pain, but continues to strive to maintain food and shelter.

If you look closely at my film, you can see that Joey and Penny both were living in a state of denial. In an early scene, Steve offers condolences to Joey since his wife had died a short while back. Joey doesn’t elaborate or show any sign of concern. Penny is unusually outgoing and pleasant to others considering she has just heard her mother’s name. She remains unconcerned, bright, and happy. In reality, I think Penny is walking around feeling empty inside. She is starting to lack the ability to show real human emotion. She never cries or gets angry. She has put a wall around her feelings and is likely suffering greater than any of the three characters.

Abraham Maslow, a theorist, writer, and American psychologist famous for his theories about human development wrote a book in 1954 titled *Motivation and Personality*. In this book he describes how human needs evolve and the steps that must be mastered in a life in order to reach self actualization. This is illustrated in his famous pyramid or hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow, a person's life must be managed by taking care of their basic needs first and then moving on to the higher ones. Basic needs are those needs that must be met for physical survival, such as food, water, air, and sleep.¹⁹ Maslow describes the classical hierarchy of needs and illustrates how one must first take care of his or her basic or primary needs before moving on to love and security.²⁰

Joey's behavior in the film is consistent with Maslow's theory and the hierarchy of needs. Joey strives to maintain the basic needs of the family which is food and shelter. He is unable to move up Maslow's hierarchy of needs now and therefore cannot help his daughter cope with her mother's death. He is unable to move past the basic needs of food and shelter. This is due to his addiction and no coping skills. Joey numbs his pain with narcotics and attempts to raise his daughter while he is impaired. Steve, the benign enabler friend, enters on cue to play the role of victim and savior.

Steve, in fact, is not the friend that he believes himself to be. According to the Al-Anon literature, "It is hard to keep boundaries between caring for self and others. There have been times when we have all engaged in enabling destructive or inappropriate behavior in other people".²¹ I believe that my film accurately portrays the role of the "enabler" through Steve's character and could be used as a teaching tool illustrating the dangers of the "do gooder". It is

¹⁹ Robert J. Taormina and Jennifer H. Gao, "Maslow and the Motivation Hierarchy: Measuring Satisfaction of the Needs," *The American Journal of Psychology* 126, no. 2 (2013): 155, doi:10.5406/amerjpsyc.126.2.0155.

²⁰ Taormina and Gao, "Maslow and the Motivation", 156.

²¹ Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc, *Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism* (New York: Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1984), 108.

important to note that not all “enablers” are aware that they are part of the problem, but tend to believe themselves as being helpful.²²

One example of enabling behavior is shown when Steve continues to loan money to Joey. Steve loans Joey money at the beginning of the film and does not get repaid. After witnessing Joey’s strange behavior, Steve again, loans him forty dollars for gas without any questions asked. Steve had loaned Joey money the first time when arriving at his home, primarily, because he was naïve and didn’t know that Joey was addicted to drugs. The second time when Joey asks if Steve could loan him forty dollars for gas, Steve is beginning to wise up, but gives Joey the money to avoid confrontation. This is how many people become enablers. They help and finance the addiction to keep the peace. According to a recent article in *Psychology Today*, an enabler is one who constantly comes to the rescue of his or her partner and consequently, this encourages the negative or unhealthy behavior.²³ When Steve supports the finances of Joey, he is encouraging the toxic environment in which they live.

My film sheds light and brings awareness to the problem of drug addiction. It is illustrating the impact on the family, showing deterioration of moral standards and severe personality changes that can result from substance abuse. It is intended to “shock” the audience with the unexpected outcome. This aspect of my film boldly mimics reality. Life is unpredictable for the substance abuser, accidents increase, health declines, and general disorganization is apparent in one or more areas of his or her life.²⁴ To date, there is no easy solution or known substance abuse program that can address all the issues surrounding the substance abuser.

²² Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, *Al-Anon Faces*, 112.

²³ Suzanne Degges-White Ph.D., "Good Friend or Effective Enabler?" *Psychology Today*, last modified October 10, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifetime-connections/201610/good-friend-or-effective-enabler>. 22 February 2018.

²⁴ Naomi Sadeh and Arielle Baskin-Sommers, "Risky, Impulsive, and Self-Destructive Behavior Questionnaire (RISQ): A Validation Study - Naomi Sadeh, Arielle Baskin-Sommers, 2017," *SAGE Journals: Your Gateway to World-class Research Journals*, last modified March 21, 2016, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1073191116640356>. 21 February 2018. 1088.

Alcoholics and Narcotic Anonymous are both 12 step programs that are the most comprehensive outpatient programs for substance abuse available. They have a motto at the meetings “keep coming back, it works” These words have a double meaning. Relapse rates are high and recovery is taught to be a day to day process. The substance abuser is never really cured, according to the medical model of addiction, but stays straight only by not using one day at a time.²⁵

Not only is substance abuse a physical addiction, but drug addiction also has a psychological component that is often based on the need to feel good.²⁶ After addiction has taken hold of the individual, new issues may arise from his or her behavior. Legal, work related, and interpersonal relationships are just a few of the social aspects that suffer neglect in the life of the addicted.²⁷ Solutions that focus on sobriety for all substance abusers and or opioid drug users should be made available to all.

Because of our technology, there has never been a time in history where so many people can be reached. Television is still a profound media for the masses, but I feel smartphones, tablets, and personal computers are the best interactive tools to get people engaged. Inside the vast network of technology rampant in almost every segment of society today, young and older adults alike can be reached through their preferred device. More could be done to encourage companies to fund stop-motion animated computer based films to support the distribution of educational information. Then programs and assistance can be made available to individuals with opiate addictions, their families and friends and the community at large. Education is the first step to engage the general public. I believe that this can be done with restoring the art of

²⁵ Alexandre B. Laudet, PhD, "The Impact of Alcoholics Anonymous on Other Substance Abuse Related Twelve Step Programs," PubMed Central (PMC), accessed March 8, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2613294/>.

²⁶ Melody Beattie, *The New Codependency: Help and Guidance for Today's Generation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 81.

²⁷ Beattie, *The New Codependency*, 88.

stop-motion animation and applying this medium toward a new direction. The new direction would be producing stop-motion animated educational short films beginning with the opiate epidemic.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My short stop-motion animated film *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short* reveals how I use stop-motion animation by combining various traditional techniques that result in a variation of Claymation. With a background in Fine Arts, I see myself as an innovator in filmmaking. I am not afraid to mix traditional styles, nor timid to take a medium traditionally used for cartoons and apply it to substance abuse. Entering the field as an outsider to the animation industry allowed me greater flexibility to choose and create. If I had began my career in film with a strong background in computer animation, I would have been bound by techniques and theory unique to this field. My artistic philosophy of how I prefer my work to show that the human hand was involved coincides with my personal aesthetic. This is my personal philosophy and puts my career at a once in a lifetime juncture where the old school crosses path with the new digital age.

When characterizing my own work, I compare my style to that of the traditional stop-motion animators Peter Lord and Nick Park. Lord is one of the co-founders of Aardman Animations, Ltd. This British production studio is known for producing films such as *Wallace and Gromit* that introduced the world to stop-motion animation. (fig. 1) Peter Lord, like myself, was an innovator, and the first to use plasticine in the model making process. My film making approach resembles that of Lord, in that I believe the tactile feel of the material, and uniqueness found in hand designed models of clay and other malleable mediums is essential in the development of lifelike characters. Although, as a fine artist I consider myself as a traditional impressionist, as a stop-motion animator, my aesthetic varies. Here in this medium my artistic preference is closer to realism. I look for details and do not strive for perfection in my model construction, however, my goal is consistency. It is not important that the lines are equal and all props are uniform, in fact, this is where my philosophy differs from Lord. Too much realism

makes me feel as if my work is computer generated. I do not want to be a filmmaker whose work appears to be mass produced.

My favorite quote from Peter Lord sums up how I feel about stop motion animation: “Stop frame is like live music, played on traditional instruments, compared to a studio recording using the finest instruments in the world, all the latest technology and some electronic instruments. The latter is more polished, unrepeatable, inaccurate, in a word, human. It all depends on whether the audience cares or not about humanity”.²⁸ My topic of the film reflects my concern for humanity. I share the enthusiasm of this pioneer in Claymation and his artistic philosophy, but my actual style is closer to the work of contemporary filmmaker Thurop Van Orman.²⁹

The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack, was both created and directed by Thurop Van Orman. (fig. 2) It is an American animated television series that I first saw on the Cartoon Network as an adult. There are many similarities between the work of Orman in his cartoon series and my film. Both Orman and myself prefer the same genre of comedy, surrealism and satire. My film is not comical, as that would be inappropriate for the subject matter. Yet, for those with a dark side, I did introduce some subtle satire into the storyline and theme with the mismatched elements and contrast of paradise to death. The city in which the characters live in Flapjack is fictional and my characters reside in a fictional city as well. The name of the city in my film is not mentioned, but from the title, the viewer could surmise they lived in Paradise city. His artistic influence is reflected in my film and is apparent when you look closely at my background. I painted lovely, bright, and dream-like watercolor paintings for the background, but

²⁸ Bendita Qian, "A Collection of Data Gathered- Stop Motion Part 1," BenditaAnimations, last modified December 21, 2012, <http://benditaanimations.blogspot.com/2012/12/>.

²⁹ Ariane Lange, "Inside The Marvelous Mind Of Thurop Van Orman," BuzzFeed, accessed February 23, 2018, https://www.buzzfeed.com/arianelange/thurop-van-orman-flapjack-cartoons?utm_term=.bdG2VgOddP#.beKPXv2BBJ.

did not use a smooth surface. As in the Flapjack series, my background was painted on a rough, gritty surface. Also, the idea of living near sunshine and the ocean are intimated in my film. Finally, *The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack* takes place on an island and the episodes all involve water or water activities. I believe that texture was the strongest influence of Orman that is reflected in my film. The gritty background was a clue to the viewer that my film would not end smoothly.³⁰

My personal aesthetic has evolved from drawing superheroes to the traditional styles of fine art seen in impressionism. Traditional artists such as Francis Folger Brown and Beulah Brown, who are now known worldwide, influenced my artistic eye. It is the work of Francis F. Brown that inspired me to create art that revealed something beautiful, but not concrete. His technique was magical to me. As an impressionist, Francis F. Brown's art conveyed a message that was otherworldly using color and texture. (fig. 3) Francis F. Brown made me understand the phrase “a picture paints a thousand words” after exposure to his work. Visual arts and cultural influences of my generation have also contributed to the development of my overall artistic style and these will be discussed as well.

Short lesson based animated films are my favorite and this preference likely can be traced back to my memories of watching Aesop's Fables cartoons as a child. When researching the history of Aesop's Fables, I was surprised to learn that in the early 1920's, American cartoonist Paul Terry produced a series of animated short stories on film known as the Aesop's Fables. He opened his own company, Fables Studios, Inc., and continued through the advent of sound with film until 1929 when he left starting his company, TerryToons Studios.³¹ Terry used what is

³⁰ Lange, “Inside The Marvelous”

³¹ Donald D. Markstein, "Don Markstein's Toonopedia: Terrytoons," Don Markstein's Toonopedia, accessed February 23, 2018, <http://www.toonopedia.com/terrytoo.htm>.

known as the Inkblot Cartoon Style. This was the most common animated style seen in early silent film.

Most historians refer to the inkblot cartoon style as Rubber Hose Animation, because the characters arms and legs were animated as if made of rubber tubing. The characters were lacking joints such as elbows or knees.³² I also use models which need to be constructed prior to filming the stop motion animation. While I desire form that is unique to my animated character, it is not my goal to make it uniform or anatomically realistic. Using Styrofoam, wire and plasticine, my characters and models appear somewhat malleable. I prefer to leave the audience with room to imagine that my character could possibly be someone they know. I do not draw in joints or muscles with detail, but leave this as a given. A strong resonance exists between my artistic aesthetic choice and that of Terry Paul. Traditional artistic styles that influence my work are impressionism, post impressionism and surrealism as well.

Music added to animated film in the 1930's made it appear that not only did everyone dance to the background music in the cartoon, but everything else dances to it as well. With the advent of sound to animated film, there still was a lag in the new technology. This style sometimes falls into “accidental nightmare fuel territory” because of its tendency toward surrealist humor. Most likely, the humor on these cartoons will probably not amuse the children of today, but these films are a kind of time capsule that allow those of us living in the 21st century to see what was funny in the early days of the 20th century. The music in my stop-motion animated short film on drug abuse is in line with the odd or frightening aspect of Terry Paul’s use of music. The end scene in my film when Joey dies, the music plays a catchy tune about a hole in daddy’s arm. In line, with Terry Paul’s style, I inserted this song to make the audience shake their heads and to question, “What has just occurred?” I believe this was the

³² Markstein, “Don Markstein’s”

effect that Aesop's Fables had on the viewers. It was "Aesop's Fables" and the use of morals that seeded the idea for my stop-motion animated film; I believed early in life that animation could be used to educate. This theory, that a lesson can be learned from a cartoon, was the basis of my creative film project.

My first exposure to impressionism was through viewing the paintings of the great, late Francis F. Brown. This local artist, portrayed with his brush stroke on Masonite board, the magical qualities present in living strands of flowers. Fortunately, this local, Muncie, Indiana artist had decided to paint the "hollyhocks" growing in his own backyard. His is a style which is so unique and layered in light, motion with depth and color. It caught my imagination, and made a strong imprint upon me.

Every time I studied the art work of Francis F. Brown, I could see something different. This encouraged me to create art that had personal meaning. Furthermore, Brown inspired me to create art to which other people could relate. Beulah Brown, his wife, is nationally known for her still life and watercolor paintings. I found her paintings to be refreshing and uplifting to my soul. She used pastel colors of spring in many her floral paintings, along with a berry colored hollyhock from her own backyard, and her paintings always caught my attention. I would stand and gaze in reflection. (fig. 4)

According to Art Smart: Indiana, the members of the Hoosier Group are recognized for being part of two major artistic trends of their day regionalism and impressionism. Of the two, their adherence to impressionism has been studied most closely. The technique and philosophy of Impressionism was new and radical at the turn of the century when the Hoosier Group was formed.³³ The artists, Theodore C. Steele, William Forsyth, Otto Stark, John Ottis Adams and

³³ J. Ronald Newlin, "ArtSmart: Indiana," ArtSmart: Indiana, accessed February 27, 2018, <https://www.artsmartindiana.org/resources/hoosiergroup.php>.

Richard Gruelle may not be familiar to all, but their work should be. These artists gifted Indiana with delightful painted landscapes, and murals to grace libraries, schools and public buildings around the state that are still present today.³⁴

In my film, his artistic influence can be seen in the hand painted background. Although, the film is not set in Indiana where there is lovely changing seasonal foliage, the palm trees and landscape in my film reflect his style. The Hoosier Group had to make their living through practical applications such as painting portraits and teaching.³⁵ It appears that Francis F. Brown discovered that his Art was no exception and would not suffice to make a living, hence, he gifted the university with his talent as a professor and director of Art at Ball State University from 1925 until 1957.

There is something magical about Indiana Impressionism that touches my soul if I had to capture it in one word it would be “artistry.” Beulah Brown, due in part to an allergy to oil paint, chose to work with watercolor paints and chalk.³⁶ She used a palette of spring-like watercolors and pleasing, soft, romantic colors. Her influence is also reflected in my film by her prolific use of color. My watercolor hand painted backgrounds are full of spring-like colorful scenes.

³⁴ Newlin, “ArtSmart: Indiana”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Judith Vale Newton and Carol Ann Weiss, *Skirting the Issue: Stories of Indiana's Historical Women Artists* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2004), 88.

DESCRIPTIONS AND IMAGES OF THE ARTWORKS

My stop-motion animated film, *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*, examines substance abuse and its effects. With less than five minutes of film to convey this message, the dialogue and interactions between the characters made this apparent early in the screening. Concise dialogue combined with a tested story structure helped to move the story to a shocking conclusion.

My choice of using hand built models and painted backgrounds and props brought cohesiveness to the film. By bringing my characters together as a dysfunctional family. Many families are dysfunctional and this increased the chance that the audience could relate to the characters. My film is appropriate for viewing in a theatrical setting with a large audience. Or, it could be shown in a school setting. It is also suitable for individual use as well and could be made available electronically through the internet. The goal is to start a dialogue about substance abuse and to offer insight into the impact it has on the family.

I had the idea for my film before I entered the graduate program. During my first semester, I learned about storytelling and how to build a structure that drives the narrative. With these skills in place, I began researching the subject of substance abuse and interviewed an acquaintance who was a recovering addict. This subsequently, led to an interview with a couple who currently have two sons that were substance abusers. These interviews gave me a greater insight. I could compare and contrast the stories and see themes that were prevalent in addiction. I began constructing my story using parts of my own experiences along with those I researched.

The second year, the story and imagery formed an animatic. This is a moving storyboard that you use to choose camera angles, timing of scenes, and a placeholder for dialogue. While I

can appreciate the concept behind the animatic, I only found it useful during production to setup scenes and to determine the number of frames needed for each scene. During this same period, I was writing the script and found it more difficult than expected. After many revisions to the script and animatic, the vision of my film began to evolve.

Changes to the animatic continued into the beginning of the third year. I learned to cut out scenes that I thought were good, but did not lead the story in the direction I intended. These cuts are the hardest to make because I became attached to what I had created. After learning to edit in this fashion, I found myself willing to cut a scene during production when it was no longer facilitating the story.

Last fall halfway through the semester, I began construction of a ball and socket armature for one of my characters. I enjoyed the physical process of milling the parts out of sheets of brass, threaded rod, and ball bearings. (figs. 5, 6, and 7) However, the armature was impractical as it took too much time to complete. Therefore, I needed to explore another method. I decided to start producing wire armatures using aluminum wire and two-part bonding putty to isolate the joints. (figs. 8 and 9) By using this process, I could adhere high strength magnets into the feet of the models so they stood on metal plates. After these were crafted, I determined the appropriate scale for my props.

All my backgrounds and props were painted with watercolors. Some were painted on paper and then adhered to foam board or they were carved from Styrofoam and then coated with absorbent ground allowing me a surface on which to paint. (fig. 10) This process was time consuming, but gave me the appearance I desired. My method improved after practice, as I made more sets, I saw how the materials reacted together. During this process, I would attempt to recycle parts of my sets to keep the production cost lower and avoid waste.

As I started film production, I had a mental picture of what set I needed to create first. The deciding factor, on which one came first, depended on how many times each asset appeared in the film. A good example would be the scene inside the house where the couch sits in front of the window. This living room set was used in three different scenes, in five shots, and was filmed with over six hundred frames total. (fig. 11) By using this methodology, I mastered the time-consuming shots earlier and left easier shots for the end, when time was becoming limited.

The creation of lip synching and facial expressions was saved until post production. (fig. 12) Next, I converted each scene shot into movie files. I then composited them together in a rough edit with my vocal tracks to assist in lip synching. By using the frame number, I could determine when the open mouth and closed mouth sounds appeared. This saved countless hours of production time. Otherwise, I would have spent numerous hours moving the model's mouths and expressions during filming.

After post production was finished, I started the final editing. This part of the process included review of the scenes and determining how the scene fit in the film. I had to decide if the scene was instrumental to the story or if it could be cut or omitted at this stage. If kept, the second part was deciding how the scene would transition from one to the next. I used the technique of fade to black frequently to show the passage of time. After the post production, I added the title of the film, screen, and end credits. Voice tracks were added along with the soundtrack and sound effects during this phase of production.

While viewing the final cut of my film I was pleased with the effect of the background. The watercolor painted backgrounds were not painted on top of a smooth surface, but painted on a gritty, rough surface. I could not perceive the message of substance abuse and its consequences as being well received if portrayed in a perfect world. Characters should not be in a pristine,

sterile environment if they are to suffer from the consequences of substance abuse. Many of my choices in production were planned to create subtle imagery. Gritty background textures represented the rough road ahead for this family. This uneven texture can be seen in (fig. 13, 14, and 15).

CONCLUSION

Using stop-motion animation with Claymation to produce a short film that addressed substance abuse was an experimentation on my part to see if this medium could be used successfully to address educational issues, specifically, substance abuse. Traditionally cartoons and animation were often considered to go hand and hand, but this stereotype is being broken with many adult entertainment programs delivered strictly through animated film. I believe that it is our responsibility to offer more than entertainment through stop-motion animated short films. It is my desire to take substance abuse out of the closet so to speak.

Substance abuse is rampant within today's society and the consequences of this addiction is not confined to the user and his immediate family and associates. In fact, drug abuse affects the entire society. No one entity is to blame for this widespread epidemic. Therefore, the problem is vast and the way it needs to be addressed must be all encompassing to include all people from all walks of life. Buying a T shirt that reads "Just Say No" is not going to stop this escalating fire. It did not work in the 1980's by word of mouth and television commercials. Society desperately needs an effective way to reach those who are affected by substance abuse. As never seen before, electronic devices can spread the message by streaming my animated film. Hopefully it will encourage individuals who view it to search for more related content. This would initiate the need for change and start the viewer on his or her path to recovery.

In a day where technology and social media are constantly forging a stronger role in our everyday communications, I believe it becomes my civil duty to produce film that has significant meaning. Addressing this heartbreaking epidemic is crucial to the future of our society. Is my intention to encourage graphic artists to make animated films that highlight the problems surrounding the substance abuser. I encourage other filmmakers to seek corporate funding to

create educational film content and to offer treatment options to break the stereotype on substance abuse. It is my intention that my short film will encourage other contemporary artists to produce content that is not just comical, or offers a band aid approach to this epidemic, but to produce a film which links the viewer to a cure.

FIGURES



Figure 1. Park, Nick. "Wallace and Gromit." *wallaceandgromit.com*.
<http://www.wallaceandgromit.com/films/a-close-shave>. (Accessed March 23, 2018).

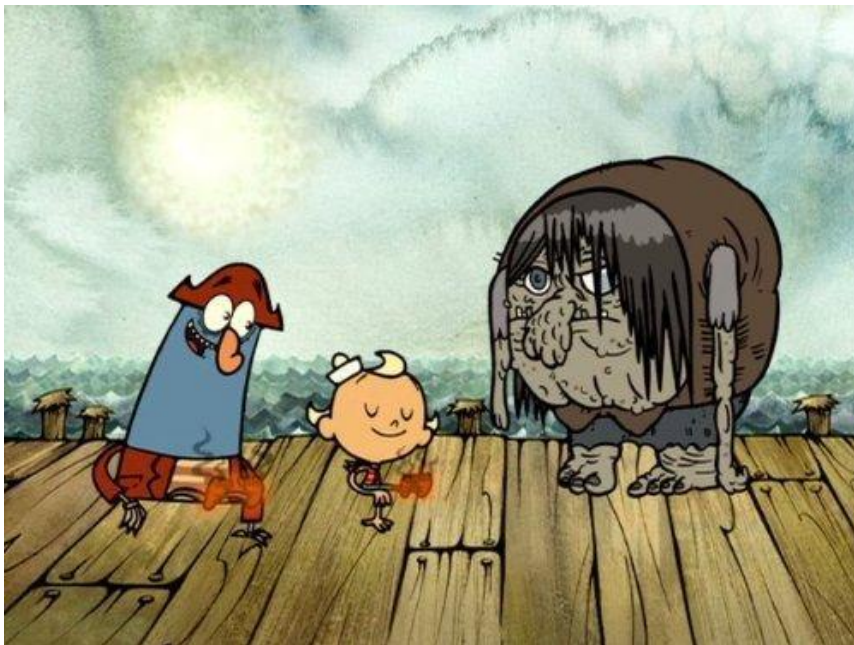


Figure 2. Van Orman, Thurop. "The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack." *imdb.com*.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1178180/mediaviewer/rm1367610368>. (Accessed March 21, 2018).

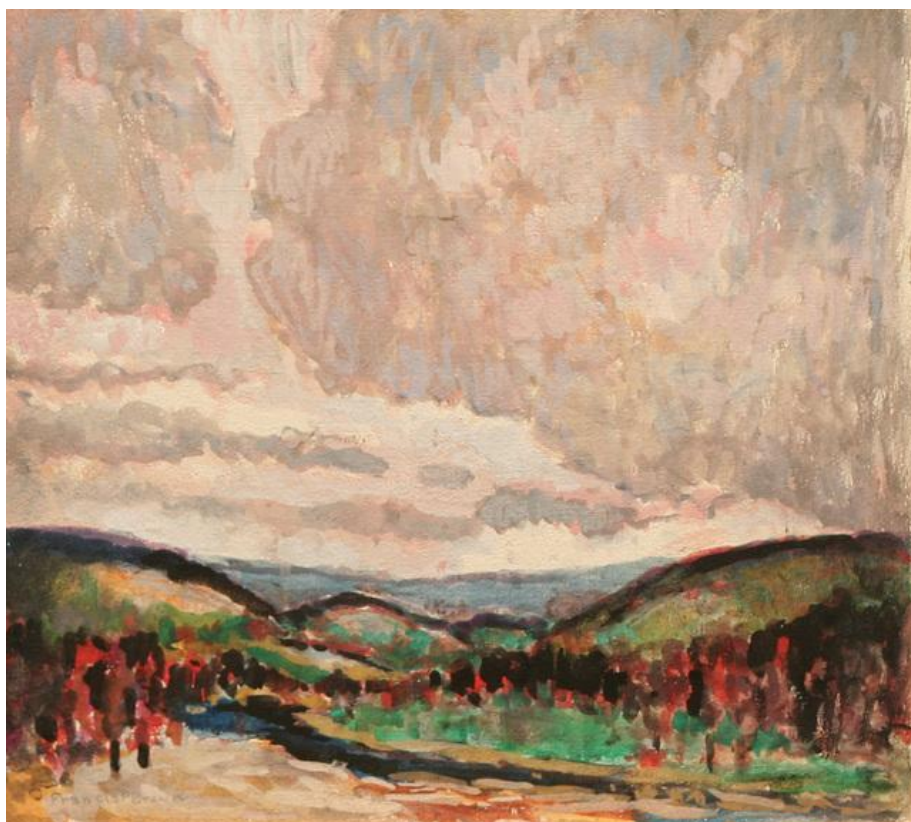


Figure 3. Brown, Francis F. "Indiana Landscape." Tempera on board, 14 x 16 inches. *Fine Estate Art*. <http://fineestateart.com/gallery/show/419>. (Accessed March 20, 2018).



Figure 4. Brown, Beulah. "Fabric Pattern." Mixed media on paper, 10 x 13 inches. *Fine Estate Art*. <http://fineestateart.com/gallery/show/375://>. (Accessed March 20, 2018).



Figure 5. Ball and socket armature parts crafted from brass sheeting, threaded rod, and ball bearings for *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*.



Figure 6. Armature parts assembled for *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*.

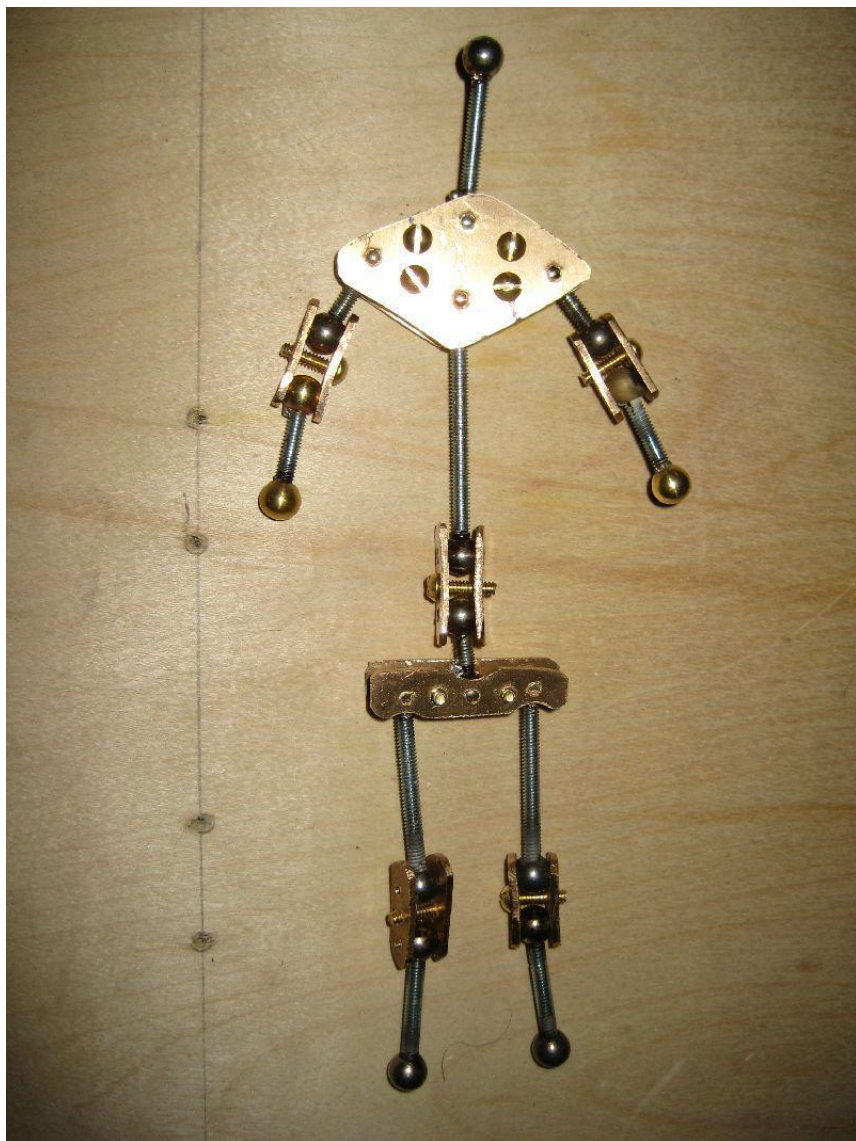


Figure 7. Assembled armature for *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*.

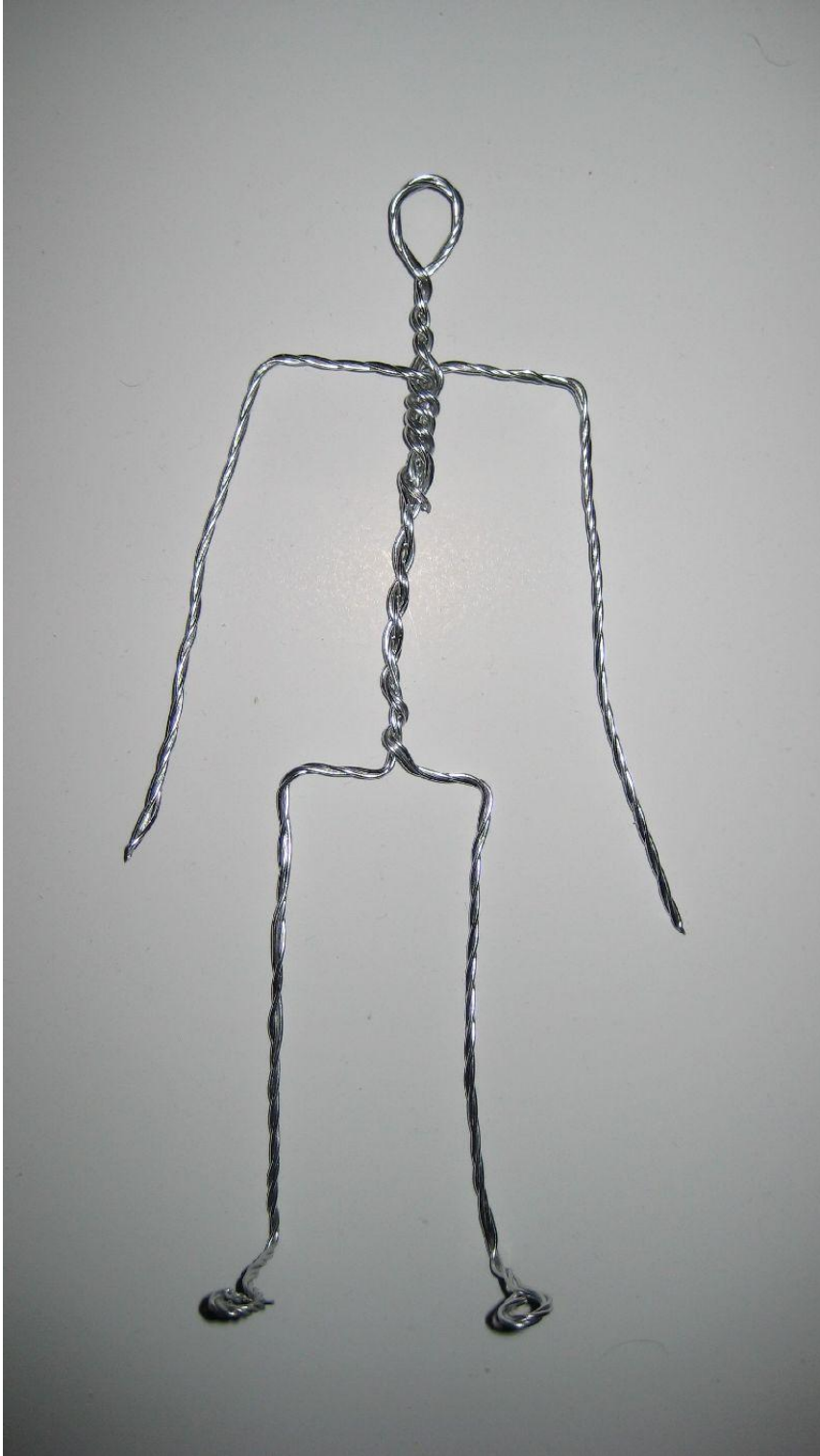


Figure 8. Aluminum wire armature created and used in *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*.

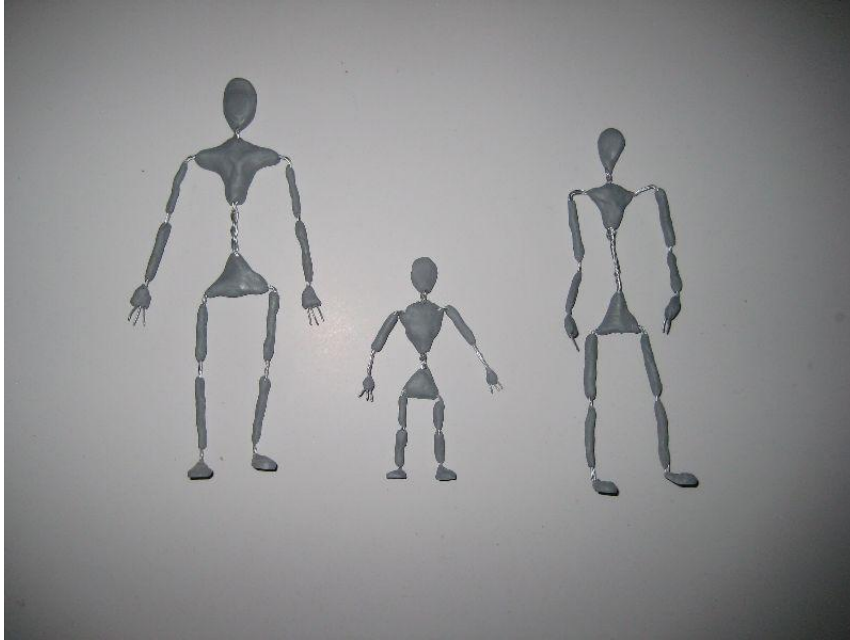


Figure 9. Wire armatures with bonding putting to add strength and isolate the joints of the puppets used in *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short*.



Figure 10. Scene 1 from *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short* shows the use of absorbent ground on the model of the bus which created a surface for the watercolors.



Figure 11. Scene 4 from *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short* shows the living room set used also in scenes 7 and 8.



Figure 12. Scene 2 from *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short* shows a post production image of the faces drawn into the frame using Adobe Photoshop.



Figure 13. Scene 3 from *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short* shows the arrival at the house and the textures of the painted surfaces.



Figure 14. Scene 5 from *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short* a look at the textures of the characters and backgrounds adding to the grittiness of the film.



Figure 15. Scene 11 from *Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short* with the bus leaving, signifying the end of the journey just as the bus in scene 1 showed the beginning.

EXHIBITION STATEMENT

Trouble in Paradise: A Life Cut Short is a five-minute animated stop-motion film that follows the life of three characters who come together out of necessity. There are no heroes or villains in this story, just ordinary people with a problem. Joey is a recently widowed father who is left with caring for his young daughter, Penny. Trying to cope with his grief, Joey turns to drugs to mask the pain. Steve is an old friend of Joey who, unknowingly, is entering this scenario after being invited to come to “paradise” and live with them.

My film is inspired by my personal experience with friends who had suffered through addiction and extensive research. The goal of my film is to bring awareness to the issue of substance abuse and the effects it has on the people around the addict. By using stop-motion animation I believe I can reach a larger audience than with other traditional methods of communication. Stop-motion animation has a quality that allows the viewer to suspend belief and become immersed into the world you have created. With this immersion I feel the message of my film is better accepted.

Using traditional methods and hand painting all my props and sets took me away from many of the digital processes prevalent in animation today. However, I did use modern techniques when they increased the speed and quality of my film. Dragonframe software was essential in producing the images for my animation. In post production, all the editing software is still crucial since films are now solely distributed digitally instead of on celluloid as in the past.

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